

Student slain in school hallway

~~MON~~ DEC 10 1985

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

As dozens of students scattered, a 16-year-old junior was shot to death yesterday in a second floor hallway of Oakland Technical High School by a classmate he had just beaten in a fistfight, police said.

Some witnesses told police that the assailant shot Andre Gray in the back, causing him to collapse to the floor, then

stood over him and fired a second shot into his chest.

Gray died at Children's Hospital at 11:30 a.m., a little more than an hour after being shot.

It was the second shooting incident on an Oakland school campus this year and the first homicide on a campus since 1983. Both of the earlier incidents were at Fremont High School.

Homicide Sgt. John Vargas

said the fight was the second between the pair in the past two weeks, with Gray winning both. Both students had been suspended for their participation in the last one.

Police are investigating the bad feeling between the two.

See **SLAIN**, Back Page

The problem of
guns at schools, A-2.

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were not dismissed

The shooting in the school at 4351 Broadway occurred as students were walking to their third period classes.

Vargas said the two youths started fighting, with Gray getting the upper hand before acquaintances of both broke it up.

The suspect, his nose bloodied, went to where two friends were holding a knapsack and pulled out a handgun from it.

Vargas said the suspect started working his way through the dozens of students in the hallway toward Gray. When he got about five feet from Gray he opened fire, causing the other students present to run for cover.

One 17-year-old Tech junior said when the shots were fired, "everybody started scattering. They just flew."

The crowd also included some students from Piedmont High School who were part of an exchange program, authorities said.

Another student said several people fell in their effort to get out of the line of fire and were trampled in the rush of other panicked students.

Vargas said the two holding the knapsack fled as soon as the suspect pulled out the gun. The suspect fled immediately after the shooting.

Witnesses helped identify the suspect, a 17-year-old Tech stu-

friends.

Lt. Al Perrodin called the shooting "a dispute between two people which had nothing to do with the school."

Vargas said it was an isolated incident which "in no way should reflect on the school administrators. There was no lack of security that led up to this," he said.

Word of the shooting quickly swept through the 1,800-student campus. Although classes were not dismissed, many students left school immediately afterwards and parents and other relatives arrived to pick up others.

The incident was a blow to so far successful efforts to improve the image of Oakland Tech, which was reopened just three years ago after a \$10.3 million rehabilitation to make it earthquake safe. The school won historical landmark status from the Oakland City Council earlier this year.

Principal Dennis Chaconas, shaken by the shooting, said "We have a fine school which provides a solid educational opportunity."

Ree Atkins, came to the school to take her 13-year-old daughter home, but only because the girl was upset, she said. She said her daughter, a freshman, would be back in school today.

For example, the bill would cause a much smaller gain. "What happened is just one of those things."

Some students said the problems were tied to a small group of students involved in drugs and gangs who, as one student said, "just feel they have to be the baddest."

Other students said the atmosphere around campus has been good.

A 17-year-old senior said the school has "quieted down a lot." The administration, she said, has tried to "put out the kids that cause trouble."

Her friend, also 17, said Tech "has come up a lot. It used to be terrible but now everybody's trying to make it better."

One of those trying to make it better is Jesus Lopez, a 17-year-old senior who is part of the school's leadership class.

He said the class, made up of about 20 students including student body officers, in an effort to instill "more interest and more pride" in the school has been trying to get more activities going.

He said a recent football homecoming was one of the best ever held at Tech because more people participated.

Yesterday's shooting, he said, "is going to set us back at least 10 years. That's the same reputation Tech had in the '70s."

Shooting tragedy puts spotlight on school gun problem

By Carol Brydolf
The Tribune

Oakland school officials say the fatal shooting of a 16-year-old student at Oakland Technical High School yesterday morning tragically underscores the scary — and relatively new — problem of guns on public school campuses here.

Officials also said yesterday that the death of high school junior Andre Gray, allegedly shot by a fellow student after a fight, serves as a graphic and grim illustration that tightened explosion codes and public information campaigns have not solved the district's firearm problem.

Oakland Technical High School, a newly renovated school that has increased its student enrollment by offering innovative academic programs, is not considered a dangerous school, officials and parents said.

Instead, they surmised that the gun problem which has plagued schools throughout the district is symptomatic of the public's increasing fascination with handguns and violence.

"Short of pat searching every student who comes in, what can schools do?" asked Judy Coates, who was so impressed with Oakland Tech's health career and humanities programs that she decided not to send her daughter to private school this fall.

"We live in a crazy society where children have access to

guns. This is just heartbreaking."

Darlene Lawson, Oakland school board president, called the pervasiveness of guns on and off campus "scarey."

"Fights between students have been around for years," she said.

"What's new are the guns ...

"It hurts my heart, because I'm a parent, to hear of a student being killed, especially at school. It seems that a student should be safe at school."

Lawson said the district will continue to vigorously enforce a strengthened discipline policy that virtually guarantees that any student caught bringing any sort of a firearm onto school grounds — loaded or unloaded — shotgun or cap pistol — will be expelled.

Last year 30 Oakland students were expelled for bringing guns to school; since the 1985-1986 academic year began July 1, five students have been expelled for carrying firearms on campus and the board is considering recommendations that another five face the same penalty.

Lawson emphasized that many students who bring guns to school want to show off, not to hurt others.

Last month, a Fremont High School student accidentally dropped a gun and the stray bullet wounded a student who just happened to be nearby.

But some students do bring weapons to school when they are angry with fellow students or school staff.

Police said that apparently was the case last week, when a 13-year-old student confronted administrators at Bret Harte Junior High School with a loaded shotgun.

No one was hurt in that incident.

Lawson and Student Services Director Thomas Tryon said the district has placed special emphasis on educational campaigns — on-going campus and commu-

nity meetings that aim to explain the district's disciplinary code to every public school student and parent.

Lawson said she expects to conduct workshops on the issue in the coming weeks. She said school officials are consulting law enforcement specialists and will consider various strategies to combat the gun problem. She declined to name any specific programs under discussion.

Tryon said he did not know whether the district would ever consider installing metal detectors at school entrances.

"Obviously something needs

to be done," he said. "But (to search students) school officials have to have a reasonable cause to believe that a crime is being or will be committed . . .

"We can't reasonably search every student who walks into school every morning."

Tryon said yesterday's shooting was apparently the culmination of a dispute that developed outside school during the weekend.

"Things that occur on weekends tend to spill over," he said sadly.

"If only we could be alerted to possible problems before school begins on Monday."

Violence shakes up community

WED DEC 11 1985

Family, friends despair over student's slaying

*"One day he's here, the next
he's not.*

*He came to school without
giving a thought,*

Will today be the day I die?

*How can there be joy on any
other day,*

*When someone takes another's
life away?"*

— Portions of a poem by Oakland Technical High School student Kim Thomas, 16, written the day after her classmate Andre Gray was shot to death in a crowded school corridor.

By Carol Brydolf
The Tribune

Charlotte Armstrong said yesterday she knew that her 16-year-old son Andre Gray was having problems with a classmate at Oakland Technical High School in recent weeks.

"He came to me about it. He told the dean and the principal," Armstrong said as she sat surrounded by friends and family in her modest 34th Street bungalow.

"That boy wanted to fight Andre," she said. "He kept after him."

The simmering dispute between the two youths exploded Monday. Andre was shot to death after a fistfight with the 17-year-old with whom he had tangled in the past. Police are still searching for Andre's alleged assailant and two of his friends.

"He asked me, 'Mama, what do you do when someone wants to fight you?'" Armstrong said. "I said, 'You just walk away.' And now I hear that he got shot in the back for walking away."



Charlotte Armstrong mourns her son Andre Gray, with son Leronne and daughter Shawneice. By Lonnie Wilson/The Tribune

'Lots of kids' bring weapons to school. 'You don't fight with fists anymore, you fight with guns.'

— Oakland Tech student Leticia Johnson

Armstrong said she had concluded that the problems between the two youths stemmed from rivalry. She agreed with Andre's classmates and teachers that her son wasn't the type of person who would pick a fight.

She said she doesn't blame the killer or the school, which she believes is an excellent one.

But she despairs at the thought that disputes between children can escalate into such tragic violence.

"To hear that a child can get

up in the morning with such evil in his heart and leave home with a gun in his hand..." she said, shaking her head.

"Something has got to be done. This child was a good child, a quiet child. It could be anyone's child next time.

"I feel it's a sad thing for a child to feel such envy and jealousy that he is violently out of control."

At Oakland Tech yesterday, the mood was also somber as students and staff tried to make sense of Monday's tragedy.

dy.

The campus flags flew at half-staff. Students remembered their classmate in a moment of silence at the start of the school day, and the normally raucous and crowded hallways were quiet and almost empty between classes.

Many parents kept their children home. Many of the students who went to classes said they had trouble concentrating on their studies. Some teachers canceled regular lesson plans and encouraged students to talk about their feelings.

"We had gotten to the point where we thought we were an oasis — that we were not connected to the rest of society," said Dennis Chaconas, Oakland

See VIOLENCE, Page B-4

Oakland Tech undaunted by tragedy

By Ruud Van der Veer
The Tribune

Three days after the fatal shooting of a 16-year-old student at Oakland Technical High School, 40 parents of future students from Claremont Middle School came to check the mood and the curriculum at the school last night.

They met a spirit of positive defiance, a refusal to let this tragedy affect the school's momentum in educational achievement.

That spirit was expressed again and again by a school board member, the school's principal, a teacher and a parent.

School board member Kathleen Crawford, who represents District 2 in which Technical High is located, called the shooting "a societal issue, not a schools issue."

She said the school district "is doing the best job that can be done" to prevent tragedies.

"The issue is, do we have a safe society?" Crawford asked.

"Our society glamorizes violence — you can see it on TV every night — and teaches young people that the way to resolve problems is to shoot someone,"

See TECH, Page B-2

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said Principal Dennis Chaconas, who came to Oakland Tech three years ago.

"I have been trying to create at Oakland Tech the same high spirit that I had when I attended Fremont High School in Oakland."

Admitting that "the week has taken its toll on me, the students and the faculty," Chaconas recalled the original challenge he faced: a school with 85 percent of its students living outside the neighborhood, test scores that were at "rock bottom" and "morale that was zip."

"The key to education is the students — are they happy, are they receiving a quality educa-

tion, and do they have school spirit," the principal said, adding that Oakland Tech students can boast of all these qualities today.

Test scores are up and keep going up 5 percent to 6 percent each year, Chaconas said. And the Scholastic Achievement Test scores are doing even better: up 15 percent in reading and 30 percent in mathematics.

"When you see those kinds of achievement, you know we're going in the right direction, we're on the move and we'll continue to be on the move," Chaconas pledged.

Dodie Lindsay, the parent of a girl attending Oakland Tech, said: "It would be a tragedy upon a tragedy if we allowed this tragic event to divert the momentum at our school — we won't let it."

Lindsay said she sees two

foundations to a sound education: educational excitement and mutual respect between students and teachers.

"The entire student body felt some sense of discouragement, a blow to their spirit — that is the potentially dangerous aspect of this event," Lindsay told the visiting parents.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS

In a story in Wednesday's Tribune about a Christmas party for Oakland youngsters sponsored by the Red Cross Youth Committee, it was incorrectly reported that Coca-Cola Co. was donating treats for the event. Pepsi Cola Co. is making the donations.